



The Farm to School Program

Across the country, an increasing number of schools and districts have begun to source more foods locally and to provide complementary educational activities to students that emphasize food, farming, and nutrition. This nationwide movement to enrich children's bodies and minds while supporting local economies is often referred to as "farm to school." The term encompasses efforts that bring local or regionally produced foods into school cafeterias; hands-on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes; and the integration of food-related education into the regular, standards-based classroom curriculum. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) supports such efforts through its Farm to School Program, which includes research, training, technical assistance, and grants.

Local what?

Regional offerings (and therefore economic opportunities for local food producers) can span the school meal tray and include everything from fresh fruit and vegetable servings to the wheat in the pizza crust, beans in the chili, rice in the stir fry, turkey in the sandwiches, and cheese in the quesadillas. Thus, farm to school includes all types of producers and food businesses including farmers, ranchers, and fishermen, as well as food processors, manufacturers, and distributors. Schools can define "local" however they choose, and definitions vary widely depending on the unique geography and climate where the school is located, and on the abundance of local food producers.



The Farm to School Grant Program

Every year, USDA awards up to \$5 million in grants to help schools connect with local producers and teach kids where their food comes from. These funds support activities ranging from training, planning, and developing partnerships, to purchasing equipment, planting school gardens, and organizing field trips. Grantees include schools and districts (large and small, rural and urban), Indian tribal organizations, producers and producer groups, non-profit entities, and state and local agencies.



We're here to help!

The USDA Farm to School Program is operated by the Department's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), which has seven regional offices around the country; in each is a Farm to School Regional Lead who is available to provide farm to school-related support to state agencies and other entities in their region. A list of regions, along with the names and contact information for regional and national USDA Farm to School Program staff, can be found on our website.

For more information, and to sign up for USDA's Farm to School E-letter, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s. Questions? Email us at farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov.

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What is farm to school?

The term 'farm to school' is generally understood to include efforts that connect schools with local or regional producers. Bringing more locally sourced, fresh fruits and vegetables into school cafeterias is a seminal activity of many farm to school efforts; procuring locally sourced, minimally processed main meal items so that the entire school meal is representative of regional options is also a focus of many farm to school programs. As such, farm to school can be inclusive of many types of producers, such as farmers, ranchers, and fishermen, as well as many types of food businesses, including food processors, manufacturers, distributors and other value-added operations.

In addition to procurement activities, food, agriculture and nutrition-based educational efforts that span a host of hands-on experiential activities, such as school gardens, field trips to local farms, and cooking classes, are also included in the concept of farm to school. Standards-based curriculum centered on food, agriculture, and/or nutrition often integrates as well.

What are the benefits of farm to school efforts?

Farm to school programs are believed to:

- Strengthen children's and communities' knowledge about, and attitudes toward, agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment;
- Increase children's consumption of fruits and vegetables;
- Increase market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers; and,
- Support economic development across numerous sectors.

Get started with farm to school!

Here are five simple steps you can take to start a farm to school program in your school or district:¹

1. Assess where you are and where you'd like to be. Are your goals centered on:
 - Procurement of local foods to be served in school?
 - Establishing a school garden?
 - Integrating agricultural concepts within the curriculum?
 - All of the above?
2. Form a team and collaborate. School food service staff, teachers, administrators, local producers and vendors, students, parents and community organizations each have an important role to play in successful farm to school programs.
3. Establish one or two attainable goals to get started. Some ideas include:
 - Identify menu items that you would like to transition to local products.
 - Work with a local farmer, rancher, food processor or distributor to get local items on your menu.
 - Determine training needs to assist food service staff with incorporating local items in meals.
 - Bring a school garden planning team together.
 - Identify curricular opportunities to connect changes in the cafeteria to activities in the school garden.
 - Bring a chef into the cafeteria or a farmer into the classroom.
 - Plan a farm field trip or host a tasting event featuring local products.
4. Promote your efforts!
 - Plan a local meal event; invite students' parents to showcase what you are doing.
 - Highlight local products on your menu.
 - Share information about local producers or school garden successes in school newsletters.
 - Bring snacks from your school garden to a PTA meeting.

5. Learn from others. If you are running into an obstacle there is someone out there who has run into it before. Some places to connect and learn from others include:
- For a list of State level farm to school coordinators and other resources, see USDA's Farm to School website.
 - To help with menu planning and understanding your local supply chain, contact your State Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, or local distributor to ask about seasonal availability of local and regional products in your area.
 - Consult the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF) Compass. The KYF initiative at USDA has a wealth of resources for all sorts of farm to school activities, including locating nearby producers, farmers markets, USDA-funded projects, food hubs, as well as other tips and tools to help you learn where your food comes from.
 - Type "farm to school" into any on-line search engine and you'll have immediate access to lots of great farm to school resources.

ⁱ Adapted from the National Farm to School Network: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/>